

Photolisting book — A publication that contains photos and descriptions of children who are available for adoption.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) — A syndrome, sparked by traumatic past events where a person emotionally re-lives past traumas and becomes withdrawn from current events. Symptoms may include sleeping problems, nightmares, intrusive thoughts, and difficulty with concentration.

Prenatal exposure — Exposure to a certain substance or influence while inside the womb.

Psychotherapy — A general term that refers to the treatment of mental disorders by such intellectual and verbal means as suggestion, analysis, and persuasion. Psychotherapy is often used in conjunction with other treatment courses like medication.

Reactive attachment disorder (RAD) — A condition resulting from an early lack of consistent care that is characterized by a child’s or infant’s inability to make appropriate social contact with others. Symptoms include developmental delays, lack of eye contact, feeding disturbances, hyper-sensitivity to touch and sound, failure to initiate or respond to social interaction, indiscriminate sociability, self-stimulation, and susceptibility to infection.

Receptive language skills — The ability to process and understand others’ spoken or written words.

Relinquishment (*see also Surrender papers*) — The legal process by which birthparents voluntarily surrender rights to parent their children. After relinquishment, birthparents have no legal right to further contact with the children.

Remedial — Concerned with aiding study habits and raising a student’s general competence in a learning area.

Residential care/treatment — A structured, 24-hour care facility that provides psychological therapy to help severely troubled children overcome behavioral problems that adversely affect family interaction, school achievement, and peer relationships. Residential treatment tends to be the last resort when children are in danger of hurting themselves or others.

Respite care — Child care and other services designed to give parents temporary relief from their responsibilities as caregivers.

Resource room or class — A room or class that students with special education needs attend to obtain help that enables them to succeed in mainstreamed (also known as inclusion) classes. Instruction may cover test-taking skills, study skills, or skills related to the child’s specific disability.

Reti’s disorder — An inherited disorder primarily found in girls. Birth and development in affected females is normal until the age of 6-25 months, when progressive loss of voluntary control of hand movements and communications skills, ataxia, stereotypic hand movements, seizures, autistic behavior, intermittent hyperventilation, and hyperammonemia appear.

Semi-open adoption — An adoption in which a child’s birthparents and pre-adoptive parents exchange

largely non-identifying information. After the child is placed in the adoptive home, contact with the birthfamily may involve letters or pictures or other communications sent through an intermediary or the adoption agency.

Separation anxiety — Excessive and persistent anxiety about being separated from one’s home or parents that interferes with normal activities.

Shunt — *See Hydrocephalus.*

Special education — Specialized educational services designed to address disabilities in intelligence, language skills, perceptive skills, behavior, or social and emotional development that make it hard for a student to learn well in a regular classroom.

Special needs — Conditions that make children harder to place for adoption, including emotional or physical disorders, age, race, being in a sibling group, a history of abuse, or other factors. Guidelines for classifying a child as having special needs vary by state. Common conditions and diagnoses include attachment disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, developmental disabilities, fetal alcohol syndrome, learning disabilities, and oppositional defiant disorder.

Speech therapy — Treatment of speech defects and disorders like stuttering. Therapy may include audio-visual aids and exercises to help a child develop new speech habits.

Subsidies — *See Adoption assistance.*

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) — A federally funded needs-based disability program for adults and children that provides monthly cash benefits and, in most states, automatic Medicaid eligibility.

Surrender papers — legal documents that a child’s birthparents, legal guardian, next of kin, or court-appointed advocate can voluntarily sign to give up or relinquish their parental rights to the child.

Termination of parental rights (TPR) — The court process through which a birthparent’s legal claim to his or her child is permanently removed. TPR actions are brought when birthparents will not voluntarily relinquish their rights.

Tourette’s syndrome — A severe neurologic disorder characterized by uncontrolled facial and body tics and often accompanied by grunts, snorts, and involuntary vocalizations.

Therapeutic foster home — A foster home where the parents are trained to deal with a wide variety of children, including those who are developmentally delayed, moderately or severely disturbed, delinquent, or medically fragile. Therapeutic parents also receive more help and supervision than other foster parents.

Tracheostomy tube — A two-inch to three-inch metal or plastic tube inserted as an artificial airway in the trachea (windpipe) on the anterior surface of the neck that keeps the stoma and trachea open. Also called a trach or trake tube.

Waiting children — Children in the public child-welfare system (foster children) who cannot return to their birthhomes and need permanent, loving families to help them grow up safe and secure.

Glossary of Terms

Abandonment — When a parent refuses to physically, emotionally, or financially support his or her child. A signed relinquishment or surrender of parental rights legally constitutes abandonment.

Abuse — Harm inflicted on a person through physical, verbal, emotional, or sexual means. Abuse may cause victims to develop emotional or behavioral problems, some of which may not appear until later in life. Therapy may be needed to work through abuse issues.

Acting-out behaviors — Behaviors in abused children that reflect abuse they have experienced or witnessed. For instance, physically abused children may be more inclined to hit and hurt other children, and sexually abused children may try to engage other children or adults in inappropriate sexual activity.

Adaptive delay — Adaptive behavior can be described as “practical intelligence” that enables people to manage within their own environments. Individuals with an adaptive delay fail to adjust to their environment within expected time ranges.

Adjustment disorder — Emotional or behavioral symptoms like depression, anxiety, sleeping problems, and inappropriate conduct that develop in response to an identifiable stress event but are more intense than one would expect from such a stressor. Children with adjustment disorders may experience significant trouble in school and in social situations.

Adoption assistance — Federal (Title IV-E) or state payments and other benefits designed to offset the short- and long-term costs of adopting eligible children who have special needs.

Adoption benefits — Benefits, such as financial assistance or monetary reimbursement for the expenses of adopting a child, available to workers through some employer-sponsored programs.

Adoption exchange — A state or regional organization that has information about children who are waiting for adoption within the state or region.

Adoption petition — The legal document through which prospective parents request the court’s permission to adopt a specific child.

Affective disorder — A class of mental disorders characterized by a disturbance in mood.

Agency adoption — An adoption completed with assistance from an organization of licensed, trained adoption professionals.

Anti-social behavior — Conduct and actions that run at odds with customarily acceptable behavior. Children with such behavior may skip school, get into fights, run away from home, persistently lie, use drugs or alcohol, steal, vandalize property, and violate school and home rules.

Aortic stenosis — Progressive narrowing of the heart’s aortic valve that obstructs the passage of blood from the left ventricle into the aorta. Chronic stenosis can lead to left ventricular enlargement and congestive heart failure.

Asperger’s syndrome (AS) — A neurobiological condition characterized by sustained impairments in social interactions and development of repetitive,

restricted patterns of behaviors, activities, and interests. Children with AS usually have no obvious delays in language or cognitive skills or in age-appropriate skills. Despite attention deficits and organization problems, these children typically have average and sometimes gifted intelligence. Early intervention and continued support can be effective in treating AS.

Attachment disorder — A condition characterized by an inability to develop significant emotional connections with other people. Children who have been abused and/or neglected, even when very young, may find it difficult to form significant ties. Signs of attachment disorder include difficulty maintaining eye contact, lying, and not responding to affection.

Attention deficit disorder (ADD) — A lifelong developmental disorder that affects an individual’s ability to concentrate and control impulses. A child who has ADD is not hyperactive, but often has trouble staying on task and concentrating for longer periods of time.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) — A lifelong developmental disorder that involves problems with attention span, impulse control, and activity level. Typical behaviors include: fidgeting or squirming; difficulty remaining seated when required; distractibility; difficulty waiting for turns in groups; difficulty staying on task with chores or play activities; difficulty playing quietly; excessive talking; inattention; and engaging in physically dangerous activities without considering the consequences.

Autism — A disorder originating in infancy that is characterized by self-absorption, decreased socialization skills, sensory impairments, repetitive behavior, and language dysfunction.

Behavioral disorders — Disorders influenced by such factors as heredity, brain disorders, diet, stress, and family functioning that cause such symptoms as hyperactivity, aggression, withdrawal from social interactions, self-injurious behavior, immaturity, learning problems, excessive anxiety, or abnormal mood swings.

Bipolar disorder — A major affective disorder that is characterized by severe mood swings between major depression and mania. Sometimes the mood swings are dramatic and rapid, but most often they are gradual. Previously referred to as manic-depressive illness, bipolar disorder is often a chronic recurring condition.

Birthfamily — Those who share a child’s genetic heritage; blood relations; extended family members.

Birthparent — A child’s biological mother (birthmother) or father (birthfather).

Cerebral palsy (CP) — A non-hereditary condition that results from brain damage before, during, or after birth. Children with CP lack muscle control in one or more parts of their bodies but can possess very normal mental functions.

Closed adoption — An adoption in which birthfamilies and adoptive families have no contact and know only non-identifying information about each other.

Cognitive delays — Delays in the customary

development of a person’s ability to process information or think logically or analytically.

Conduct disorder — A condition characterized by a strong unwillingness to meet societal norms or expectations. A child or teen with conduct disorder may bully or threaten others, initiate fights, stay out late without permission, use weapons that could cause serious harm, be physically aggressive or cruel to animals or humans, force someone into sexual activity, or steal, lie, or break promises to obtain goods or to avoid debts or obligations.

Depression — A biological-based mental illness that can have lasting emotional and physical effects, such as: feelings of worthlessness, guilt, or indecision; difficulty concentrating; change in appetite or sleep habits; loss of energy, interest, or pleasure; loud, violent, troubled, agitated, slowed, or anti-social behaviors; drug or alcohol abuse; and difficulty with interpersonal relationships. Children and adolescents may suffer from either major depression or manic depression (also known as bipolar disorder). Both are serious medical problems that can be treated with medication and psychotherapy. When untreated, extreme cases can lead to suicide.

Depressive disorder — An affective disorder manifested by either a dysphoric mood or loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities. The mood disturbance is prominent and relatively persistent.

Developmental delays — Delays in a child’s developmental progress as measured against other children’s development of skills (sitting up, walking, toilet training, talking, etc.) at the same age.

Developmental disabilities — Any condition or disorder of the body, mind, or emotions that interferes with a child’s normal development.

Diaphragmatic hernia — A condition present at birth where there is abnormal protrusion of abdominal contents upward through a defect in the diaphragm. This condition is treated as a surgical emergency due to interference with the infant’s breathing. Smaller, less serious diaphragmatic hernias may also be seen in adults.

Disruption — When an adoption is discontinued or annulled before or after finalization through a decision by the adoptive parents, the child, or a legal authority.

Disruptive behavior disorder — An overarching term to classify children and adolescents with disorders like attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, and conduct disorder that prove disruptive in school and other settings. Indications include distractibility, impulsivity, hyperactivity, non-normative risk-taking behaviors, difficulties at school or with family and peers, inattention, frustration, aggression, and difficulty following rules.

Dysthymia — A form of low-level depression characterized by a lack of enthusiasm for life and a sense of discouragement about the future. Other symptoms may include fatigue, insomnia, and low self-esteem.

Dysthymic disorder — *See Dysthymia.*

Emotional disturbances or disabilities — A condition,

either regular or occasional, often evidenced by a lack of respect for authority, problems in school, an inability to handle changes easily, and problems with other children. Other characteristics can include sleep disturbances, mood swings, and a tendency to act impulsively without considering consequences. Therapy is recommended throughout childhood and adolescence.

Emotional behavior disorder (EBD) — An emotional disability characterized by one or more of the following: pervasive mood of sadness or depression; consistent or chronic inappropriate type of behavior or feelings under normal conditions; inability to learn that cannot be adequately explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; and inability to build or maintain interpersonal relationships with peers and/or teachers. Children classified as EBD are eligible for special education services in school as provided for under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997.

Emotional mental impairment — *See Emotional disturbances or disabilities.*

Expressive language skills — The ability to express one’s thoughts and feelings in words.

Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) — Birth defects and serious lifelong mental and emotional difficulties that result from a child’s prenatal exposure to alcohol. Symptoms may include learning and behavioral disorders (including attention deficits and hyperactivity), poor social judgment, and impulsive behaviors.

Finalization — The final legal step in the adoption process, which involves a court hearing where an adoptive parent or parents become a child’s legal parent(s).

Foster children — Children who have been placed in the state’s legal custody because their birthparents were deemed abusive, neglectful, or otherwise unable to care for them. While under state care, such children often live in foster homes or group homes.

Foster parents — State-licensed adults who provide a temporary home for children in state custody whose birthparents are unable to care for them.

GED program — A program through which adults who do have have a high school diploma can take a series of general education development (GED) tests for writing, social studies, science, language arts, and math to earn a high school equivalency certificate.

Group home — A facility staffed by social workers and counselors that houses groups of children who need emergency temporary shelter or a long-term living arrangement. Residents are typically over the age of fiv and often include teens and sibling groups.

Home study — A process through which prospective adoptive parents are educated about adoption and evaluated to determine their suitability to adopt.

Hydrocephalic — *See Hydrocephalus.*

Hydrocephalus — A condition caused by an abnormal build-up of cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) in the brain. Hydrocephalus can be present at birth or acquired. There is no known way to prevent or cure hydrocephalus, but the most common treatment is to surgically insert a shunt (a flexible tube placed into the

brain’s ventricular system) that diverts the CSF into another region of the body for absorption.

Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) — A federal law passed in 1978 that protects the rights of Native American children, families, and tribes. ICWA states that when placing a child of Native American heritage for adoption, preference should be given to an extended family member, a member of the tribe, a foster or adoptive family of Native American heritage, or a Native American institution. The tribe has the right to make decisions about the child’s placement, and non-native families are considered for placement as a last resort. ICWA adoption provisions do not, however, apply to every Native American child in foster care, especially in cases where the children’s Native American birthparents are not registered tribe members or if the tribes formally give up their claim to the children.

Individualized education plan (IEP) — A plan drawn up by a child’s special education teacher and other concerned parties that outlines specific skills the child needs to develop, as well as learning activities that build on the child’s strengths.

In utero — In the womb; before birth.

Intellectual disability — Intellectual functioning significantly below average with limitations in adaptive behavior that affect self-help, living, or social skills.

Intermittent explosive disorder (IED) — A condition characterized by feeling little control during tense situations and failing to resist aggressive impulses, often resulting in explosive behaviors like acts of verbal and physical assault or destruction of property that are out of proportion to the situation at hand. A child’s or adolescent’s past experiences of abuse can be the cause of their IED.

Learning disabilities — A condition that makes it hard for a person to take in, sort, and store information; not a sign of below-average intelligence.

Legally free — The term for a child whose birthparents’ rights have been legally terminated or relinquished so that the child is free to be adopted by another family.

Legal-risk adoption — Placement of a child in an adoptive home when birthparents’ rights have not yet been voluntarily or involuntarily terminated.

Loss and grief issues — Unresolved emotional distress that can result from being removed from a birthfamily, experiencing a parent’s death, being abandoned by a parent, entering foster care, moving between placements, or having one’s parents’ parental rights terminated. Because children often have trouble understanding, expressing, and dealing with feelings about painful losses and separations, these issues can cause depression and acting-out behaviors.

Mainstreamed — In school, when a child is moved from a classroom where he or she was receiving extra help or special services to a standard classroom.

Medicaid — A federally funded program that provides medical care for low-income families and individuals.

Mentally retarded or challenged — Intellectual, cognitive, and behavioral impairment that is usually classified as mild, moderate, severe, or profound. Mildly

or educably retarded individuals (the category into which most retarded individuals fall) are cognitively impaired but can learn academic skills and be trained to work at semi-skilled jobs, live independently, and drive. Moderately retarded individuals can talk, care for basic needs, learn functional skills, and handle semi-skilled or unskilled work in sheltered conditions. Severely retarded individuals have limited communication skills, slow motor development, possible physical handicaps, and limited ability to care for basic needs and assist with their own maintenance. Profoundly retarded individuals have minimal responsiveness, physical handicaps, poor motor development and communication skills, and the ability to do only highly structured activities.

Microcephaly — Abnormal smallness of the head (often accompanied by microencephaly) that results in a lack of stimulus for the head vault to grow. Microcephalic children are usually mentally and developmentally retarded.

Microencephaly — Abnormal smallness of the brain that can result from a genetic disorder, intrauterine infection, or intrauterine trauma.

Motor skills — A person’s ability to use large and small muscle groups. Gross motor skills refer to the use of large muscles in such activities as running or jumping. Fine motor skills refer to small muscle coordination required for things like writing or buttoning a shirt.

Neurological disorders/problems — Emotional or mental disorders/problems that appear as anxieties, obsessions, phobias, etc., but are not typically so severe that the person loses touch with daily realities.

Non-identifying information — Information about a person that gives a general sense of what they are like but does not reveal specific details like their last name, address, phone number, or social security number.

Occupational therapy (OT) — Physical or skills training that helps disabled persons to better manage daily living. Therapy may include teaching infants to suck or swallow, helping developmentally delayed children develop motor or language skills, or training mentally disabled individuals to complete work tasks or care for their personal needs.

Open adoption — An adoption that involves some amount of direct contact between the birthfamily and adoptive family ranging from exchanging names to sending letters and scheduling visits.

Oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) — A disorder characterized by behavior like frequent loss of temper, a tendency to argue with adults, refusal to obey adult requests, deliberate behaviors to annoy others, spiteful and vindictive behavior, use of obscene language, and a tendency to blame others for mistakes. Symptoms sometimes indicate the early stages of conduct disorder.

Pervasive developmental disorder (PDD) — A neurobiological disorder that affects a child’s social, mental, linguistic, and physical development. Children with PDD often experience behavioral, emotional, and motor problems and require occupational, speech, language, physical, and other therapies.